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Paintings

by

Frederic E. Church, N. A.

Special Exhibition

at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art

May 28th to Oct. 15th

New York

Published by the Museum

May 1900





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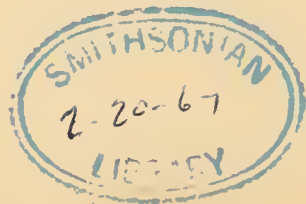
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FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH

A brief note upon Mr. Church and his work is appropriate upon the first exhibition of a collection of some of his most important pictures.

For more than a quarter of a century Mr. Church has been withdrawn by physical infirmity from the ranks of the producers of art. His career was stopped when he was in the maturity of his powers, and still retaining the enthusiasm of youth.

The spirit made an heroic effort to conquer the physical disabilities; the right hand refusing to do its work, he learned to paint with his left hand; he maintained to the end of his life his indomitable spirit; he planned great works; he was full of ideas which struggled for expression; but inflammatory rheumatism is a foe that the artist fights in vain. Mr. Church could only busy himself with his art in a fitful way. Fortunately he could rest upon his reputation, caring little for the notoriety that depends, either in literature or art, upon constantly engaging the public attention by a new performance.

He had already, while comparatively young, attained a commanding eminence as a landscape artist, abroad as well as at home, and had done for American art, in his field, what Irving did for its literature.

We can scarcely overestimate the debt of America to Mr. Church in teaching it to appreciate the grandeur and beauty of its own scenery, and by his work at home and in tropical lands in inculcating a taste and arousing an enthusiasm for landscape art,—that is, landscape art as an expression of the majesty and beauty of the divine manifestation in nature.

During the quarter of a century that this spirited artist was forced to be little more than a spectator, there have been great changes and fluctuations in the world of art, and many waves of shifting public taste. From time to

time expectation has been excited of new methods, that were to make obsolete all the canons of art of the historic masters, just as in poetry new lights discovered that form was a bondage to inspiration.

Mr. Church did not share these delusions, yet it is an interesting matter of speculation how the new movement might have affected his work if he had actively continued in it, with his superb equipment and his vast experience.

Mr. Church was himself a pioneer and an adventurer. He was born in Hartford, May 4, 1826, in a New England atmosphere that was as far as possible from being artistic. Independently of his surroundings, he began before he was sixteen to teach himself drawing with the aid of very insufficient help. Through the influence of friends, Thomas Cole, the first American landscape artist, was induced to take him as a pupil, the first he had ever received, and it was with Mr. Cole in his Catskill home, that Mr. Church was stimulated in his love of nature, and began to learn how to interpret it.

This was with him no return to nature out of conventionality, as was effected by Sir John Millais and Holman Hunt, the two exponents of the pre-Raphaelite school in England, but it was an original devotion. And he came to nature not to copy its external features, but with the real inspiration of art, to interpret it. He was doing in fact, and without knowing it, very much what Millet and Rousseau were doing in France, and much in the same way. He was a religious student of nature as they were. He learned to draw as they learned, with absolute fidelity to the forms of nature. He made infinitely painstaking studies both with pencil and brush. He was as careful a reproducer of nature in details as was Sir John Millais. He came to know his subject in this way. But his paintings were not studies. He aspired to interpret nature in its higher spiritual and æsthetic meaning.

Millet brought to the knowledge of the world the peasant of Brittany; Rousseau, whose passion was for the noblest product of nature, the tree, taught the world to see it in its beauty. All these three artists painted their pictures,

in which they put their own personality and genius, in the studio, from their own faithful studies of reality.

Sir John Millais surprised the London conventionality by the elaborate, the minute details of his foregrounds and the marvelous effects of his backgrounds, direct realities of outdoor work.

Mr. Church at the same time, as if this movement were general in art, was producing those wonderful foregrounds, in which there was a knowledge of botany as well as of form, and which a later age, an age of inspiration, calls photographic.

But this is not the place to push this discussion any further than is necessary to show the character of Mr. Church's work, and to look at him rather as an interpreter than a copier of nature ; but we should not lose sight of his extraordinary technical facility and ability. He was able to interpret nature because he knew it in its most intimate details and his hand was trained to express what he saw and felt. If the young artist would see how technical perfection of form rises into power and the very life and movement of nature, let him study the painting of rapids in Church's Niagara. He had a wonderfully true feeling for color, for harmony. The whole surface of his picture was expressive, and every square inch helped the noble effect he sought to produce.

No other person of his own generation, certainly, had such power of aerial perspective, or of giving the relative value of distances. These are great achievements that no change of fashion can make obsolete. In his composition Mr. Church has shown the qualities of the great Masters, orderly, lucidity and harmony of design, with the highest poetic sentiment.

Mr. Church died on the 7th of April, 1900, in New York, on his return from Mexico, which had been his winter resort for many years. In years and physical infirmity he was seventy-four. In his spirit, his heroic

cheerfulness, he was still young, hopeful of the world, the staunchest and most helpful of friends, and as clear and sweet in his Christian character as he was decided in his luminous rendition of the atmosphere of the distant mountains of his great pictures. He saw and felt the divinity in both worlds.

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER.



FALLS OF TECENDAMA

Painted for Mr. Cyrus W. Field
Painted by Mrs. Wm. F. Judson

Signed and dated 1854

Calcutta 61 x 40 .

cheerfulness, his eye with sympathy, his heart the truest and
most helpful of hearts, and so clear and sweet in his Christian character
as he was revealed in his luminous rendition of the atmosphere of the
distant mountains of his great pictures. He saw and felt the divinity in
both worlds.

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER.

FALLS OF TECENDAMA

Painted for Mr. Cyrus W. Field
Lent by Mrs. Wm. F. Judson

Signed and dated 1854

Canvas 64 x 40





COTAPAXI

Painted for Mr. Cyrus W. Field
Loaned by Mrs. Wm. F. Judson

Signed and dated 1854

Canvas 42. 33





MOUNTAINS OF HAWAII

Painted by Mr. W. H. Osborn

Loaned by Mrs. W. H. Osborn

signed and dated 1895

Canvas 75 x 40

MOUNTAINS OF ECUADOR

Printed by Mrs. W. H. Osborn

Lithographed by Mrs. W. H. Osborn

London 1844





NIAGARA

Loaned by the Corcoran Gallery

Signed and dated 1857

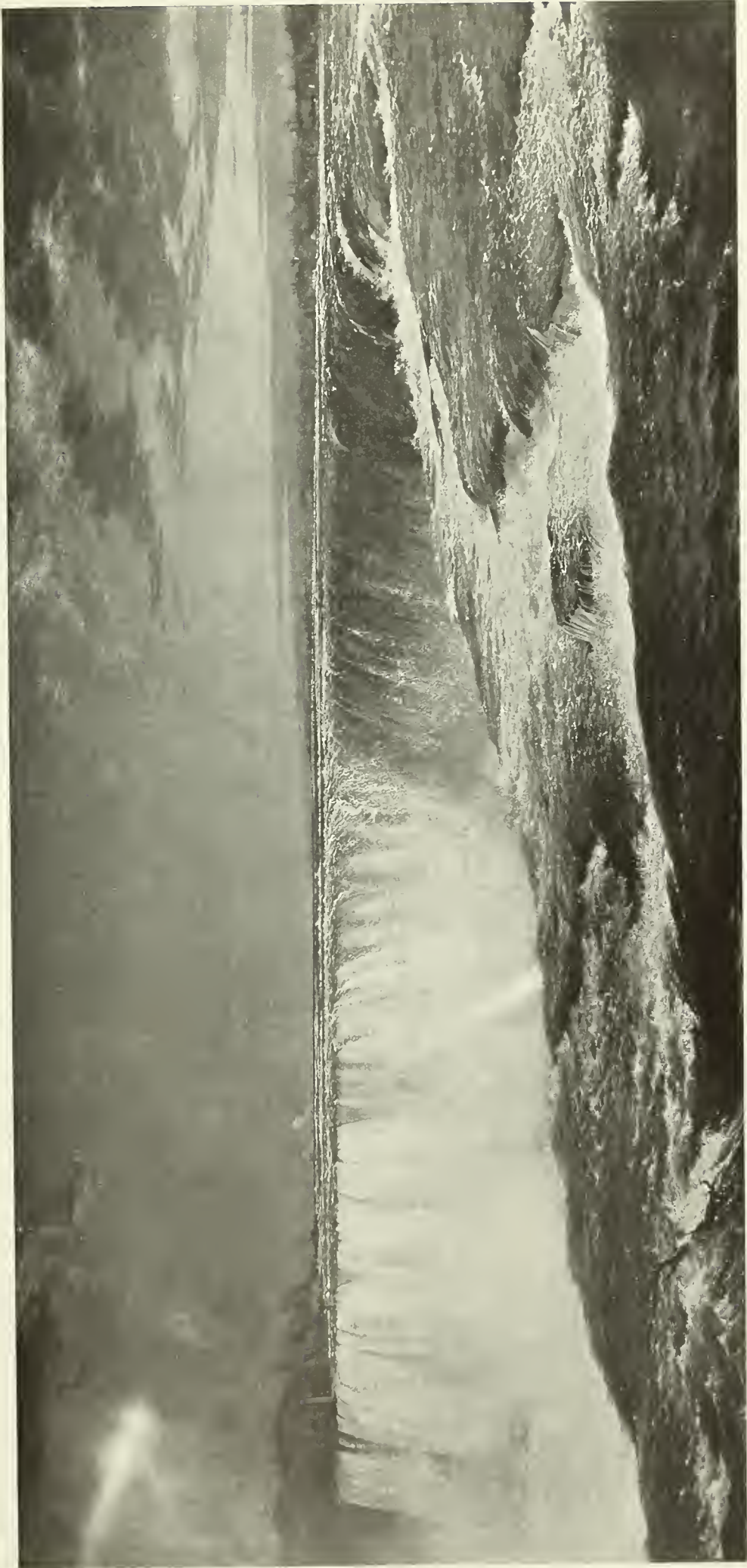
Canvas 92 x 43

NIAGARA

Loaned by the Corcoran Gallery

Signed and dated 1857

Canvas 92 x 43





HEART OF THE ANDES

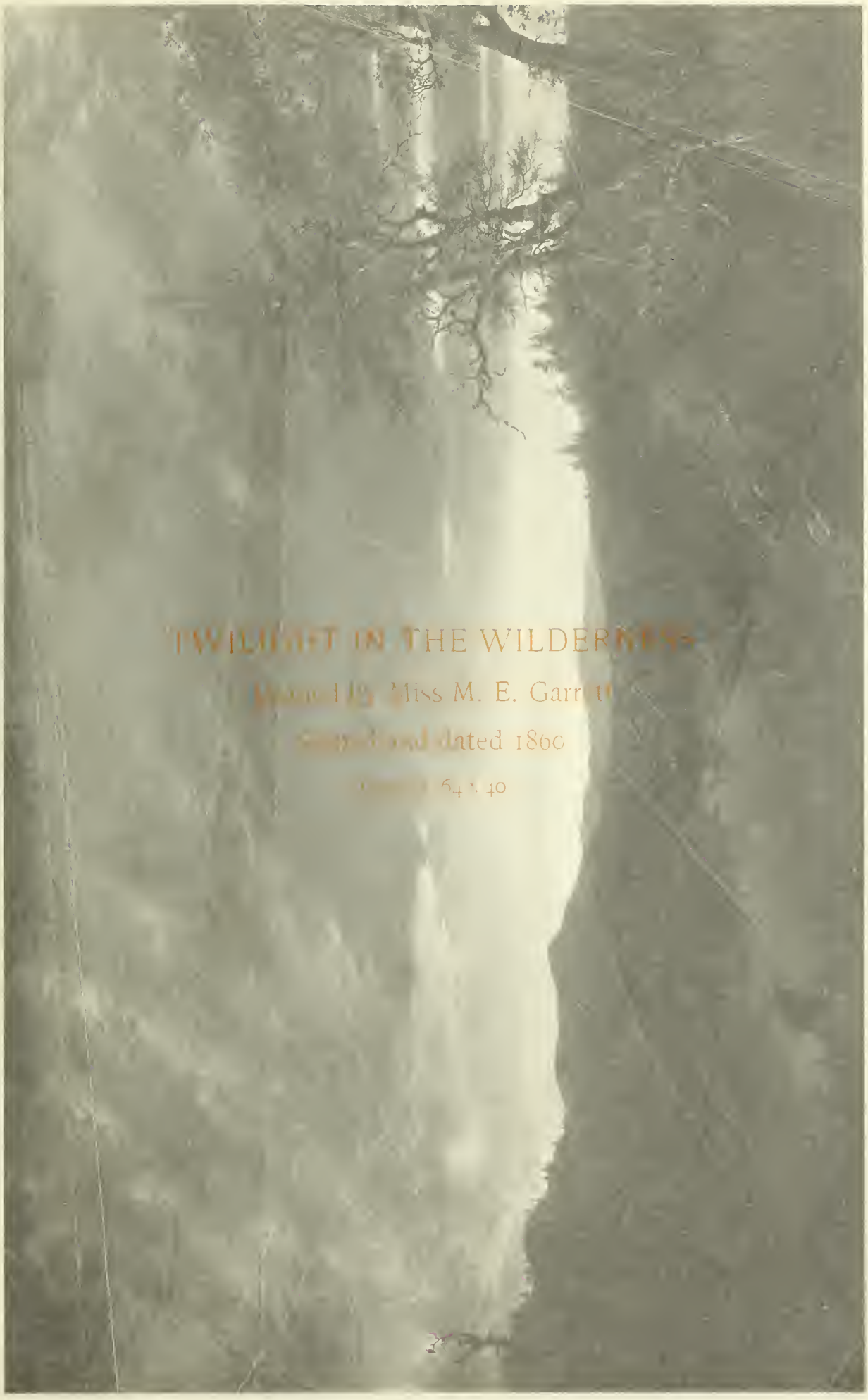
Painted for Mr. Wm. T. Blodgett

Loaned by Mrs. David Dows

Signed and dated 1859

Canvas 119x65





TWILIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS

Painted by Miss M. E. Garrett

Painted and dated 1860

Size 64 x 40

TWILIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS

Edited by Miss M. E. Garrett

Copyright and dated 1860

Class of 740





THE PARTHENON

Photographed and loaned by Mr. M. K. Jessup

Printed and dated 1871

Copyright 1871





LE KHASNA PETRA

Painted by Mrs. F. E. Church

and engraved by Mr. L. P. Church

Designed and dated 1872

London 8



A sepia-toned landscape painting of a tropical scene. The foreground shows a path or clearing with dense, dark foliage on either side. The middle ground is dominated by a large, light-colored, misty or smoky area that obscures the background. The overall atmosphere is soft and ethereal. The painting is mounted on a light-colored page.

MORNING IN THE TROPICS

Painted for and loaned by
Mr. Wm. E. Dodge

Signed and dated 1877

Canvas 84 x 54

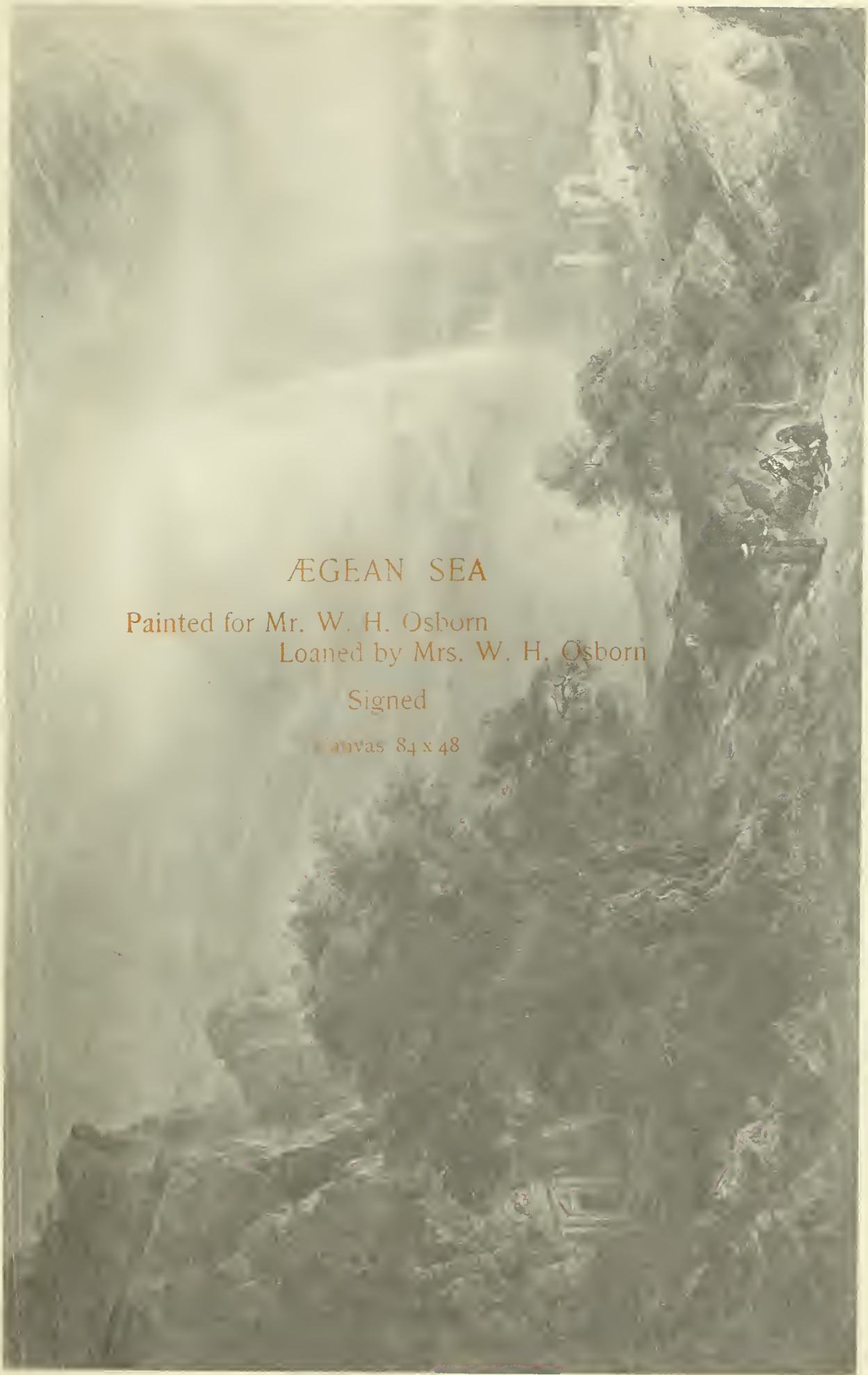
MORNING IN THE TROPICS

Painted for and loaned by
Mr. Wm. E. Dodge

Signed and dated 1877

Canvas 84 x 54





ÆGEAN SEA

Painted for Mr. W. H. Osborn
Loaned by Mrs. W. H. Osborn

Signed

Canvas 84 x 48

ÆGEAN SEA

Printed for Mr. W. H. Osborn
by Mrs. W. H. Osborn

Signed

Class 84248





PLATE 107
Large tree trunk in foreground
of a dense forest
with a large tree trunk in the foreground



AURORA BOREALIS

Painted for Mr. Wm. T. Blodgett
Loaned by Mrs. Wm. T. Blodgett

Signed and dated 1856

Copyright 1856





RAINY SEASON IN THE TROPICS

Painted for Mr. Marshall O. Roberts

Loaned by Mr. H. C. Sturges

Signed and dated 1866

Canvas 84 x 55

RAINY SEASON IN THE TROPICS

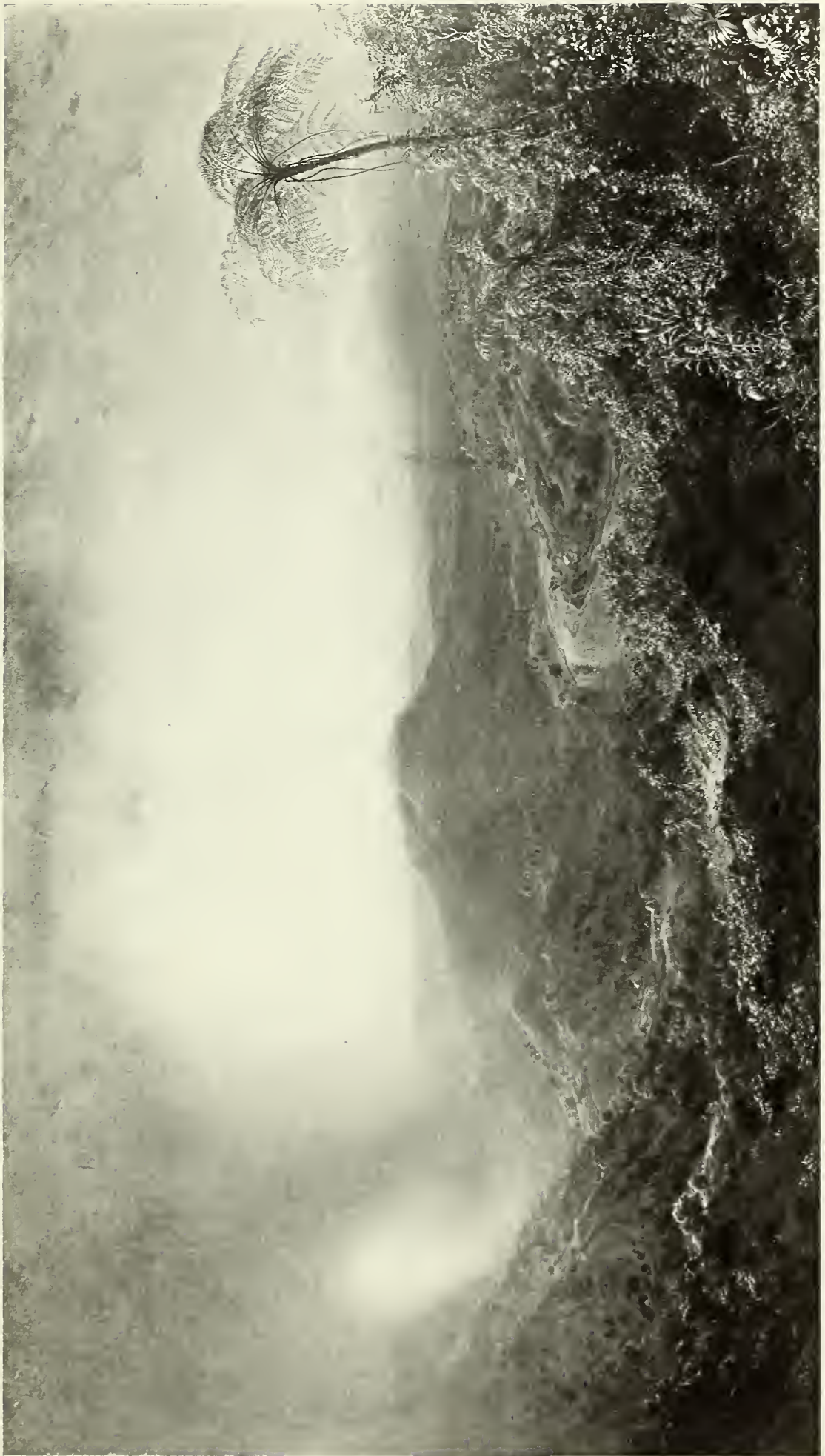
Painted for Mr. Marshall O. Roberts
Loaned by Mr. H. C. Sturges

Signed and dated 1860

Canvas 84 x 52







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